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Canby, is essentially "a propaganda of the experience of youth, where the fact that mother's face was ugly, not angelic, is supremely important, more important than the story, just because it was the truth."

This, and much more, of similar tenor is as shrewdly and warmly penetrating as Professor Canby's remarks, in other volumes, upon college students, their minds and ways. On the whole, more of Professor Canby's essays have something of this vital quality than altogether lack it.

BABBITT. By Sinclair Lewis. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

A cheap, vulgar life is cheap and vulgar! This appears to be the real message of the new novel by the author of *Main Street*. There is, to be sure, a suggestion of another note formerly not strange to Mr. Sinclair,—the joy of working out one's own salvation, or trying to,—but this spirit is only a weak infusion. In his later novels, indeed, this author seems to have shifted his emphasis from the more or less unreal (but entirely possible) individual who rebels against a real environment, to the more or less unreal environment which slays the individual. There is a gain in technique, perhaps, but scarcely in significance.

The significance of this central idea can in no way be proved. *Babbitt* is not a picture of American life; American life is too big to be pictured in a single novel. Besides everyone knows that while Babbitt, a real-estate man, has no philosophy but that of "hustle", no wit but that of coarse chaff, and is ignorant about many things, such as drainage, that pertain to his specialty, you cannot have half-an-hour's chat with the average American—garage man, architect—without discovering more sense and knowledge than Babbitt is ever allowed to possess. Your garage man will tell you something of the idiosyncrasies of women who drive cars, or are driven in them; your architect will tell you how it is that school-buildings may be made not only fire-proof but panic-proof, and both will have really good ideas about bringing up children. Babbitt and his group are not typical of America.

But are they not typical of some small section or stratum of American life? If so—and America is so various that one cannot deny it—then they are not pictured with the careful Balzacian realism necessary to make them true.

No, the truth is, *Babbitt* is simply a satire—a monstrous, bawling, unconscionable satire, on phases of American life that Mr. Lewis happens to have chosen and which he has concentrated arbitrarily and quite unnaturally into a single-life story. Mr. Lewis is the most phenomenally skillful exaggerator in literature to-day. In his sour way he excels the cheerful mendacities of Mark Twain, whose whimsy about the man who was caught in the carpet-weaving machine and woven into ten yards of Brussels carpet cannot compare in egregiousness with some of Mr. Lewis's realism. Mr. Lewis cannot really parody the advertisements of those who profess to teach will power, public speaking, and how to succeed—though he tries even this. But he is fairly successful with Billy Sunday. In the story, the Reverend Mike Monday

concludes a harangue full of the most amazingly truculent vulgarity with these impressive words: "Now I guess the folks in this man's town will quit listening to all this kyoodling from behind the fence; I guess you'll quit listening to the guys that pan and roast and kick and beef, and vomit out filthy atheism; and all of you'll come in with every grain of pep and reverence you got, and boost altogether for Jesus Christ and His everlasting mercy and tenderness." It would be vain to hope that this passage will ever be excelled.

One can read *Babbitt* as a satire—though it is not great satire;—but a comparison of it with *Tono Bungay* or *Mr. Brilling* is fatal to the American novel. Wells too is satirical, unconventional, neither to hold nor to bind. But he is also immensely human. Mr. Sinclair's humanity, as manifested by the people in his story, is in the way of throwing a brick at one's wife and afterwards being sorry.

Professor Canby is right: this "literature of protest" has to be written, and it would be a mistake to suppose that it has no significance. But even the younger generation, who revel in rebellion, is rather shrewder in its appreciation of life than Mr. Lewis is in his story—it is not hard to be shrewder than a man who has a thesis. And they will remorselessly check him up with their own experience which even, when it is not large, usually begets a certain clear and non-theoretical wisdom. It will be Mr. Lewis's fate to be smiled with, and also a good deal smiled at, by youth.

Yes, satire is good even in large doses, sometimes; but one cannot help feeling that when the Main Street fashion has passed, a new Dickens, sentiment and all, may be hailed as the wisest of all writing men.